

coloured, and containing only a few blackened ova; the oviduct is spotted with dark patches, and considerably contracted.

And thirdly, in birds with the male plumage predominating over that of the female, the ovarium is reduced to a small dark amorphous mass, resembling coagulated blood, the presence of ova cannot be detected, and the oviduct is almost entirely obliterated at its junction with the ovarium. Thus it seems that there are three distinct phases in this peculiar abnormal state of the generative functions.

I have also noticed that, in most cases where the male plumage is in excess of the female, the tail-feathers are particularly long, some being as much as 19 inches in length.

Although Mr. Yarrell states that this condition of the female generative organs is not confined to the *Phasianidæ*, and that it has occurred in the gold and silver pheasants, partridges, pea-fowl, common fowl, common pigeon, king-fisher, and common duck, and that other classes of animals are liable to an influence similar in kind, particularly among insects and Crustacea, yet this disorganization is rarely observed except among the *Phasianidæ*, and particularly when these birds are produced in a domestic state, *i. e.* on the present system of breeding pheasants in preserves. Very few *battues* take place in which some of these birds (generally designated mules) are not killed and mixed indiscriminately with the heaps of the slain.

As to the cause of this disorganization, if it occurred only in the old female, or if it were a common occurrence among birds either of different genera or of the same genus, it could be easily accounted for; but when it is generally found existing among a class of birds which are bred in vast numbers in a particularly artificial manner, it leads one to suppose that the cause must be connected with this condition. Whether the eggs laid by a number of females—to whom perhaps, from circumstances, too few males have been admitted—have been imperfectly fecundated, and therefore the chick improperly formed, remains a subject for future consideration.

2. NOTE ON THE GIGANTIC EARTH-WORM (*MEGASCOLEX CÆRULEUS*) FROM CEYLON. BY SIR JAMES EMERSON TENNENT, K.C.B., V.P.Z.S., ETC.

[In 1853 the British Museum received, through Mr. Hugh Cuming, two specimens of a large Earth-worm from Ceylon, which is evidently the *Megascolex cæruleus* described by Dr. Templeton in the 'Proceedings of the Zoological Society' for 1844, p. 89.

A few days ago Sir James Emerson Tennent kindly procured from Ceylon, and sent to the British Museum, a specimen of the same worm, and, in reply to my inquiries respecting the habits and vernacular name of the animal, sent to me the following letter, which, with his permission, I lay before the Society.—JOHN EDWARD GRAY. *British Museum*, Feb. 11, 1862.]

“ Board of Trade, Feb. 10th, 1862.

“ MY DEAR SIR,—The large Annelid which I sent to the Museum a few days ago was recently forwarded to me by the Principal Civil Officer in charge of the North-eastern Province of Ceylon ; it was obtained by him from the vicinity of Trincomalie.

“ My attention had frequently been attracted, during my rides through the forests in the north of Ceylon, by the heaps of earth in the shape of “ castings ” thrown up and piled on the surface, often to the height of 12 or 18 inches. These occurred in low and moist ground, and chiefly in the beds of dried-up tanks shortly after they had been deserted by the subsidence of the waters. The natives assured me they were the products of huge earth-worms, which I was told often grew to the length of 2 or 3 feet, with a proportionate thickness.

“ I made some efforts to obtain specimens, but, owing to the apathy of the Singhalese and their indifference to anything illustrative of animated nature, I could not succeed. One reason why I was myself less likely to come on these creatures during my rides was that the traces I saw were fresh only at the early dawn, showing that the worm worked chiefly during the night.

“ Some months ago I wrote to Mr. Morris, the gentleman I allude to, at Trincomalie, and by him I have been supplied with the specimens which I have sent to the Museum. It is cut into two parts, together about 22 inches long.

“ The vernacular name for them I do not know, nor is it probable that the Singhalese have given them any specific designation, other than the general term equivalent to *vermin*, which they apply to the whole tribe of minor reptiles and Annelids.

“ The existence of these very large earth-worms appears to have been known to some of the French naturalists ; for in D’Orbigny’s ‘ Dictionnaire d’Histoire Naturelle ’ I find he has noticed the Ceylon species in the following terms, under the designation of *Megascolex* :—‘ On sait qu’il en existe d’assez grandes, et l’on en a rapporté des parties chaudes de l’Amérique qui n’ont pas moins d’un mètre de longueur\*. Il en existe de semblables dans l’Inde ; et il a été trouvé dans l’île de Ceylan une grande espèce de *Ver de terre* dont on a proposé de faire un genre sous le nom de *Megascolex*.’—*D’Orbigny, Dict. Univ. d’Hist. Nat.* vol. vii. p. 431.

“ Faithfully yours,

“ J. EMERSON TENNENT.

“ Dr. J. E. Gray, F.R.S., &c.

“ I expect another and, I hope, a larger specimen from another district of Ceylon, which I shall be happy to submit to you on its arrival.”

\* A metre is  $39\frac{37}{100}$  inches.